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## IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON LOCAL TRADITIONAL HANDICRAFT INDUSTRIES IN BRAZIL

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*The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of globalization on the local traditional handicraft industry in Brazil. The study used a qualitative approach where an in-depth case interview method was employed for data collection. The study selected four respondents from four traditional handicraft industries (one from each) such as blacksmith, locker smith, shoemaker and machine manufacturer who work in different places in the Sao Paulo City in Brazil. Also, the study used documentation survey and observation methods. The results show that globalization has considerable negative impacts on those indigenous traditional handicraft industries which gradually decrease. As a result, the number of people occupied in these industries significantly decreases, and they face numerous economic and psychosocial problems. The findings of this study may be a useful guideline for the policymakers, development experts, academics and researchers.*

**Keywords:** *Brazil, globalization, traditional/local knowledge, local traditional occupations, local identity.*

### **Introduction**

Globalization, particularly its impacts, has gained ample attention from the policymakers, researchers, academics, politicians and social activists all over the world. After the Industrial revolution, this concept was highly expanded to think that globalization, as an outcome of industrialization and urbanization, is positive for socioeconomic and cultural development. More recently, and perhaps more clearly, the attention has been concentrated on the negative impacts of globalization which undoubtedly destroyed local and indigenous cultures, local indigenous/traditional knowledge and skills, local traditional occupations, local social capitals and management system and all these pose a threat to local identities. Similar to other territories, globalization has a wide range of impacts on the Latin American countries. Wolf (2005) argued that liberal globalization is a movement towards greater integration which creates both natural and manmade barriers to international economic exchange. Several analysts mentioned that in many cases globalization has wide negative impacts on the developing and underdeveloped countries (mainly in Latin America, Africa and Asia) whereas the rich countries benefit it.

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In many cases, these wealthy countries exported their technologies, productions (both material and non-material), culture (such as habits, values, education, foods, music, *etc.*) and communication equipment to the developing and underdeveloped countries. As a consequence, these underdeveloped and developing countries were bound to import those production, technologies and cultures as driving forces of their development. This process increased the dependency of the underdeveloped and developing countries on the developed (Western) countries.

Latin America has a broad diversity of developmental levels among its countries. Some of them, like Brazil, Chile and Mexico have taken a faster pace in achieving a higher level of economic development, while others, like Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador still have mostly a rural society and a lower level of technological and infrastructure advancement. At the same time, the cultural diversity is the key factor for understanding the Latin American identity and the diversity of its numerous communities. The multitude of art forms from the ancient civilizations of the Aztecs and Mayans till today's rich popular music, painting, folk dances and cuisine, just to name a few, reveals a lot about the diverse cultural identities present on the continent. The regional culture is also manifested in jobs and as a consequence of its diversity, a high level of entrepreneurship is common to many Latin countries. As it happened around the world, the process of globalization has produced its impact on Latin American countries.

Supported by funds provided by large organizations and flows of resources driven by international financial markets, the multinational companies and brands have placed large pressure on local businesses and cultural identity. For countries at a more rural stage of development, the overflow of goods and products produced in industrialized countries and offered to the local communities supported by mass communication means has considerably impacted the local cultures highly based on tradition, religion, folk art and peculiar local identity. On the other hand, the development of a higher standard of infrastructure allowing the distribution of these products is among the positive effects of globalization. In the countries which are already at a higher level of technological and economic development, globalization pushed mergers and acquisitions of regional and local companies forcing large regional and local companies to merge with multinational organizations. This process has ultimately weakened the local identity. It seems that internationalization of these companies has opened doors for the local well-qualified workers who acquired an international status and somehow, due to the ability to adapt, are original to their own local culture, so they could gain access to a global market, even if under the name of a multinational brand.

A vast number of studies evidenced that due to the lack of public awareness, low education and skills, shortage of investments overpopulation and mass poverty, lack of equitable distribution of resources, political influence, impacts of climate change and disasters, the developing and underdeveloped countries in Latin America could hardly get benefits from globalization; and moreover, this creates hegemony, cultural diffusion and dependency. It is noted that due to the transformation of political ideologies in these countries, there increased industries and market dependency. On the other hand, due to increasing poverty, unemployment and natural disasters, people from rural areas gradually migrated to the city areas in search of employment. People become more dependent on the urban industry.



Fig. 1. Map of Brazil

The geographical location of Brazil is the Eastern South America that is adjacent with the Atlantic Ocean. It is the largest country in South America and the Southern Hemisphere. Its most territory is plane with some lowlands in the north. It has hills and mountains with 3.3 million square miles of Amazon rain forest. Globally, Brazil is one of the leading economies in the world (ranking the 9<sup>th</sup>), but this is also true that one observes here one of the most unequal wealth distribution among the population in comparison with other countries of the world. According to official statistics of the Government of Brazil, nearly 25 per cent of the population live under the poverty line. The Brazilian census recently categorized 305 different indigenous ethnic groups, speaking 274 languages. All these languages run the risk of becoming extinct due to the small number of people speaking each of them. It is important to note that as much as 17.5 per cent of this population does not speak Portuguese at all. Moreover, there are 69 groups still isolated or having the only contact to the rest of the society through other indigenous groups.

Similar as in other countries, this has negatively impacted the traditional handicraft industry in Brazil such as blacksmiths, locksmiths, traditional manufactures, wood makers, shoemakers, and so on. When an emerging country pushes economic development, local identity will drive small businesses to search for market opportunities, positioning products and services from a local culture perspective as a way to face competition from stronger multinational brands and companies. The strength of the global financial markets, supporting global or multinational brands, brings an unreasonable competition to local businesses, building socio-cultural conflicts within emerging countries. There is evidence that due to industrial production most of these local traditional occupations are obliterating from the society and this becomes one of the tensions for the local identity both in the developing and underdeveloped countries. In the case of Brazilian capitalistic form of democracy, the poor people do not get any kind of benefits from globalization and in many cases the poor people rather lose their indigenous skills-based occupations like, for example, blacksmith, goldsmith, locksmith and many others.

Based on four in-depth case interviews with representatives of traditional handicraft industry (namely, a blacksmith, a shoemaker, a wood maker and a traditional locksmith), this paper tries at highlighting some driving factors as well as impacts of globalization which seem to impede this industry in Brazil.

### Literature Review: Conceptual Framework

For the literature review, this study has used a Qualitative Interpretative Meta-Synthesis (QIMS) and data analysis technique. The study used the Scopus and Web of Science archives to search the literature for the period between 2001 and 2018 and used seven keywords searching, namely: traditional handicraft industry in Latin America, traditional handicraft industry in Brazil, globalization in Brazil, cultural globalization in Brazil, local knowledge in Brazil, traditional knowledge in Brazil and indigenous knowledge in Brazil. According to both search engines, the number of publications on local knowledge in Brazil is larger in both Scopus and Web of Science and ranged 165 and 160 respectively. No publications are recorded on the 'traditional handicraft industry in Latin America' and 'traditional handicraft industry in Brazil'. It is evident that in all other five categories the numbers increased over time though in most of the cases the trend shows a downward after 2017.

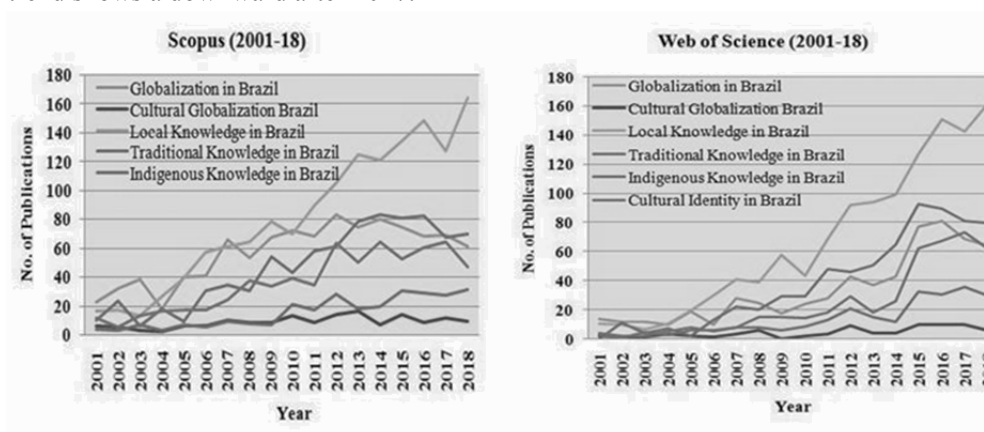


Fig. 2. Number of Scopus and Web of Science cited documents

\* Local traditional handicraft industry in Latin America = No documents are found

\*\* Local traditional handicraft industry in Brazil = No documents are found

It is apparent from these two graphs that the numbers of publications are not enough on different keywords except the local knowledge in Brazil. Also, there is a clear knowledge gap concerning the impact of globalization on local traditional handicraft industries.

### Globalization

The concept 'globalization' is one of the most vibrant and animated concepts. Globalization conceives so many meanings and components that it is very difficult to capture them in a single sentence (Islam 2019; Islam *et al.* 2019). There are so many definitions of globalization that it is very difficult to articulate them all in a few words or sentences. Daly (1999) mentions that globalization is a kind of integration of many formerly national economies into one global economy mainly via free trade and free capital mobili-

ty. Lee and Collin (2005) consider globalization as a problematic process of finding a meeting point on how events, decisions and activities in one part of the world are inter-related with another part of the world. However, globalization is a contrasting and multi-faceted phenomenon. It has a wide variation in terms of its intellectual and cultural influences across borders through widening economic and business relations (Islam 2019; Islam *et al.* 2019). In another way, globalization is a process that influences intermingling and assimilation of people, companies, and governments of different nations through international trade, investment and information technologies. This process has immediate impacts on economy, environment, culture and politics in the line with human well-being around the world (The Levin Institute 2017). Petrella (2005) describes globalization as a worldwide consumer market. Globalization is also extensively used to mean Westernization, modernization, and Americanization. According to the Levin Institute (2017), this process creates modern social structures such as capitalism, materialism, rationalism, industrialism, bureaucratism and individualism throughout the world, therefore, demolishing our inherited and indigenous cultures and traditions.

Allen and Skelton (1999) argue that cultural globalization demonstrates such dominant cultures where all people are not equally benefit it. It is noted that one of the sides of small businesses in local markets is the presence of services and goods, which partly come from work which is still performed through manual labor. Today, Western culture values the manual work. It is noted that the products of this kind of traditional handicraft have turned into a valuable industry, and the price of this product is much higher than the product of modern industry. This trend responds to the global consumerism which has now taken the shape of dominant world culture and is one of the strongest trends in globalization. From this analysis, such kind of dominant cultural process leads to liberalization of capital movements, attaining the global trade and investment markets, and increasing the use of information and communication technologies.

Brazil is one of the largest middle-income countries in the world with many gaps in terms of its socioeconomic conditions, international relations and institutional capacities. The country is also known as one of the countries having the most unequal national income distribution in the world. Although the country has achieved a significant level of economic growth over the past few decades there are still many spheres, including the living standards, health status and education, where the gaps between different segments of population are large (Maluf and Burlundy 2007; Beghin 2008). Due to its highly unequal income distribution, Beghin (2008) compared the country with some of the poorest African countries such as Sierra Leone, Lesotho and Namibia. According to him, the richest one percent of the population (less than 2 million people) possesses 13 per cent of all household income which is similar to that of the poorest 50 per cent (nearly 80 million). According to the UNDP (2010), due to its high incidence of poverty, low educational achievement, and middling health indicators the country ranked the 73<sup>rd</sup> globally in overall human development index in 2010. One can compare this trend of development as a 'conservative modernization' model which has ultimately failed to bring any positive and democratic change and has rather generated a slow economic growth. Beghin (2008) attributed this to the lack of regulation in the labour market where more than half of the population does not benefit from labour rights.

### Local Knowledge and Local Traditional Handicraft Industries in Brazil

Local knowledge (LK) is synonymized as indigenous knowledge (IK), pastoral knowledge or traditional knowledge (TK). This knowledge originates from the rural communities where people have limited or no education so they still live as one with nature. This kind of knowledge is held communally by communities that may be indigenous, rural or urban. This knowledge has been produced and preserved through those communities' everyday matters of life, food production, health, education, environment, *etc.* It is very much tied to the socio-economic, spiritual and cultural aspects of their lives and livelihoods. After the industrial revolution, this knowledge is embedded and combined in the cultural fabric woven with social, economic, technical, philosophical, learning/educational, legal, and governance dimensions. This is scientific threads of people developed and refined over time in the spectrum of globalization. This has been labelled differently in different regions and countries (Islam 2019).

Local knowledge has been strongly criticized in the global literature. Many authors think that this knowledge is 'old-fashioned', 'backwards', 'static' or 'unchanging'. Cheng (2003 as quoted in Islam 2019) strongly argues that LK is the knowledge that has been tested as valid in a local context, and accumulated by the local community or people. From its current standpoint, TK has already been proved as a body of knowledge and it has widespread application as it becomes profound via the close contact with nature (such as environment, land, weather, and natural disasters) and livelihood resources (such as people, their occupations, economy, local administration, power structure, social stratification, language, local culture, religion, values, taboos, and human skills). It is rooted in the traditional practices through trial and error and adapted with local culture, practice, values and norms, and it is commonly shared and transmitted from one generation to another. From this observation, we can argue that TK is well experimented by the local people over generations. It has two important aspects: one is that this knowledge is the identity of a particular country, community or region; and the other is that it has local acceptance which is cherished by local people who love it and care it.

These traditional skills have perceived the effects of globalization in different ways, but apparently, some changes occur mainly due to the consequences that affect urban centres. It is possible to observe transformations due to technological advancements and/or displacements, real estate valuation as the world urban population increases in its numbers and socio-cultural transformations as a hegemonic Western culture disseminates its values around the globe (Dorman 2000). When a large furniture production chain is established in an emerging economy, there are several side effects to be observed: one is the positive effect of creating jobs and building investment opportunities when local suppliers have to cope with the new demand. At the same time, this process starts to affect the local culture as it offers a new behaviour model of how to buy furniture. For instance, instead of going to a cabinet maker, a customer may go to a large store. These are two different cultural processes. Initially, the local shop establishes a more personal relationship with its community of clients and within this relationship framework, new furniture is ordered and produced. A large shop has to rely on mass communication tools to bring in customers and convince them to buy the offered goods. In this situation, no community formation occurs and it is just from this point that culture and local identity start to be fragmented and become more vulnerable to Western cultural values. In the present research, we have observed that in Brazil the local wood

workshops have mainly become repair workshops. Of course, one of their strong points is refurbishing older pieces that were produced in older times and may represent family choices, tradition and legacies, but at the same time, the repair shops start to work on pieces that were bought from large national and multinational brands that disseminate their concepts to an immense public and in this way the hegemonic Western cultural value is preserved in place of local identity.

## **Methodology**

### *Research approach and method*

This research is based on a qualitative study with application of a case study and content analysis. The content analysis is used for conceptual framework followed by a case study method where Brazil was selected as a case from Latin America. In our content analysis we used a Qualitative Interpretative Meta-Synthesis (QIMS), a nonlinear conceptualization of a cross-study data collection tool that intends to merge themes from a collection of related studies that ultimately result in a holistic understanding (Ruiz and Praetorius 2016; Islam 2016; Reza, Subramaniam, and Islam 2019; Chowdhury, Wahab, and Islam 2019; Islam *et al.* 2019). The summary of the QIMS finding is presented in the literature review section.

### *Sampling and data collection methods in the case study*

In this study, we used an in-depth case interview and observations methods for data collection where four cases were selected purposively from four different traditional handicraft industries such as blacksmithing, metalworking, shoemaking and machine manufacturing in Sao Paolo city in Brazil. The justification to select these cases is threefold. First, we wanted to provide detailed information about the impacts of globalization on these traditional local handicraft industries. Secondly, we talked to several labourers from these industries in Sao Paolo city but found that these four cases from four local traditional handicraft industries could provide the analytical-qualitative data on how globalization impacted their occupations and livelihoods. Thirdly, we thought that these four cases would provide an overall qualitative data within our limited time, manpower, and cost. We elaborated a guideline for data collection with some unstructured/open-ended questions including the scope of their work, their socioeconomic profile, opportunities and threats for their occupations caused by globalization, and future trend of traditional handicraft industry. We conducted these case interviews in a preferable and comfortable place either at their working places in their leisure time or during their breaks. We had several interviews for each case and each session took an hour time. We also developed a checklist for the observation method.

### *Research ethics and data analysis*

We followed the research ethics of the University of Malaya. Before starting the field study, we took permission from this ethical body and also took verbal permission of the four respondents, and clearly explained the research objectives to the respondents. A tape recorder was used to record the whole interview along with their photographs which were inserted in the result section. We again took field notes during our in-depth case interviews and observation with several verbatim. A descriptive technique was used for case description with some verbatim.

## Results: Impacts of Globalization on Traditional Handicraft Industries

### *Typewriter repairman*

Mr Domingos Oliveira has worked for over 20 years in the Brazilian branch of Italian typewriting machine manufacturer *Olivetti*. After computers had replaced this writing and communication machine, he started providing refurbishing and repair services not only for *aficionados* and collectors but also for some odd needs, like companies that need a mechanical back-up for issuing invoices in isolated places when there is an electricity shortage. While reflecting on his working past, it is possible to observe from his remarks that there are two relevant components in the way his business has shifted over time. Initially, his competences were mainly based on mechanical engineering technics. As a repair technician, manual precision and ingenuity were prime assets while performing his tasks as well.



Fig. 1. Mr Domingos Oliveira, typewriter repairman for *Olivetti*

According to him, ‘it has always been a work that has given me great pleasure.’ As the demand for typewriting machine shrunk over time, he started moving towards repairing household appliances. As these devices carry a lot of fragile electrical components, the demand for his expertise required some new knowledge, but his working process shifted mostly from repairing parts to replacing components. From a cultural perspective, it is possible to observe, that his business was once highly regarded by the community, as it had a direct link with the ability to write and to communicate, or if seen from a different point of view, a direct relation with present and future time. Nowadays, his occupation is regarded as something linked with the past, as it actually is, when we only look at the object itself, but if we amplify our observation scope, it is also the present and future, from a cultural perspective. As a technician, Mr Domingos understands that his occupation will change over time, as objects change with technological advancements, but what he regrets most is the loss of community relevance, as once his business used to be a point of cultural exchange between clients, providers and employers.

### *Blacksmiths*

A local blacksmith for over 30 years, Mr Edilson Santana, has his workshop in a busy neighbourhood. Not only repairing is his main occupation, but also, building steel gates, doors and windows for local customers. His workshop is situated in a presently expen-



sive part of the city, so the real estate value kept the rental prices going up and Mr Santana is planning to move to an outside downtown neighbourhood where costs are more affordable. Santana told,

I love it because it comes from my father who affords his family lives and livelihoods by this. I have seen him mold these pieces and he puts his heart in them. I just like working with metal in general. Working with my hands, in general, is peaceful and enjoyable.

The blacksmiths (who used metals through firing and strengthening of their hammers on heavy anvils thus making utensils for their communities) started to disappear after the Industrial Revolution. This is also true for Brazil. There is clear evidence in history that this work was of crucial importance during the colonization period in Brazil. After the arrival of immigrants and due to population growth, there increased the demand for tools and mechanisms to meet the needs of local communities in agriculture and transport as well as in day-to-day life. In many cases, these tools were used for defense. They preserved this knowledge, which was considered as secret, over generations. This was particularly important in terms of their techniques of working with materials like iron. Their work and approach contributed to their significant recognition, prestige and power. Due to the expansion of industrialization and later globalization, the blacksmiths' products have been hugely replaced by the metal industry. Now one may find some blacksmiths still surviving in a few places in the cities particularly in the remote areas of the world.



Fig. 2. Mr Edilson Santana, a local blacksmith

### *Shoemaker*

Mr Paulo Ribeiro has had his workshop in the same place for over 40 years in the city of São Paulo. Repairing shoes is his specialization, but he can also make new ones, especially for clients with peculiar needs. Consumerism has pushed most of his competitors out of business and he anticipates the coming end of his workshop since no one in his family has taken an interest in the occupation that kept his family for all his life.

A traditional occupation around the world, local shoemakers, are not going to fade away, but demand for them has substantially decreased along with a shift occurring in their business model. Their occupation has faced changes caused by consumerism, as

consumers buy cheap shoes and once they get worn out, a new pair is bought and not repaired. Mr Paulo said that he had taken care of his family all his life by working in his small workshop in the middle-class neighborhood in town. A craft is usually learned from minor works with someone more experienced, but today it does not get as much attention from the younger generation as it used to when he started his work. So he said, 'this is a face-to-face business, that is, you have to build closer relationships with your clients so they keep coming back, twenty years ago I used to keep personal foot models for some of my most recurrent clients.' As the business model is replaced by chains of repair shops, the close ties developed over the years tend to loosen up and with time the only remained cultural meaning is a kind of 'objectification' as the cultural meaning shifts from the craft to the object or product.



**Fig. 3.** Mr Paulo Ribeiro, shoemaker, São Paulo

#### *Traditional locksmith*

Traditional locks are still in demand since a well-made and polished set of keys keeps clients coming back to Mr Claudio Lima's workshop in the city of São Paulo. A service like his often makes him come to clients' homes late at night or on holidays. Word of mouth plays an important role in his business and is a source of reliability for customers.



**Fig. 4.** Mr Claudio Lima, traditional key cutting, São Paulo

According to his remarks, his job offers him a kind of a window into customers houses and offices, 'people allow me briefly into their private lives and I learned that discretion plays a major role in my field.' He says that technology has brought changes to this area, but it is a slow process, as most of houses and apartments still have conventional keys. 'I had to adapt and learn new tools quickly, I added new shape and design to traditional locks.' When looking for the market, a good locksmith builds a clientele not too far from his shop since a large part of his work will make him go to a client's place. One should also point out that even if it is a small shop when it is located in a higher middle-class area, the rental payment will take a large portion of the revenue, making it a challenge to maintain a business in the same place for too long. In cities facing intense real estate development, the rental prices push small businesses away, towards cheaper areas and as a consequence, open the market to electronic devices, provided by new companies with different business models, usually with no connection with the community.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Based on four in-depth case interviews with a blacksmith, a locksmith, a shoemaker and a typewriter repairman working in Sao Paulo city in Brazil, this paper showed the negative impacts of globalization on the traditional handicraft industries. As a part of the research conducted for this paper, a photographic social documentary was made in Brazil and from the situations encountered during the fieldwork, a series of documentary images were taken that help to illustrate many of the concepts addressed in this paper. The documentation side of this project portrays people and their professions, especially those which are gradually disappearing or becoming invisible to the society due to technology advancement, growth of the real estate value or social and cultural transformations.

If we consider the pros and cons of the four in-depth case interviews, we can see many globalization-caused tensions in traditional handicraft industries. As already mentioned, the presence of a strong entrepreneurship culture in Latin America has played its role in maintaining regional cultural diversity and strength. Artisanship and small business models are widespread throughout the region, but as society moves from its rural roots to an urban model, the economic diversity affects this traditional handicrafts and this leads to the loss of cultural richness. The concentration of population in large urban centres assigns a completely novel dynamic to this process. As urbanized areas become densely populated, the real estate values start to play an important role in pushing small businesses towards the periphery of the city and thus, make room for brands and services supported by mass communication means to substitute for the formerly existing significant diversity of small businesses. Together with technological advance and transformations in mass communications, these drivers have acted as significant key players in establishing global values in Brazil in recent years.

As we observe in Brazil, globalization has been intensified through political globalization while there is a clear imbalance between economic institutions and globalization. The process has eliminated most of the borders for technology, finances, trade and organizational models. As mentioned before, the natural drive for entrepreneurship is part of the Latin American culture, and many traditional professions have been remodelled as culture changes in response to newly available technologies, communications advancements and investment opportunities in hegemonic Western-value businesses. This case has massively happened in the capital city São Paulo where many people are comparatively poor and have been occupied in the local handicraft industries. They face

many problems associated with technology displacement due to globalization. We have revealed that all local handicraft industries have been declining because globalization transforms these professions in terms of quantity and quality of products, on the one hand, and changes individual choices, on the other. For example, once an indispensable tool in any administrative profession and office in Brazil, as well as around the world, the typewriters were replaced by personal computers. In other cases, many shoemakers and furniture-makers do not have orders due to the growing high-quality products coming from shoe industries and large furniture companies. The local handicraft industries, like blacksmithing are getting narrower since similar products are available in supermarkets at affordable prices. The local manufacturers and locksmiths are not in demand as most of the related products are one-time use and many of them are not repairable. This is very common in Sao Paolo and other cities and is gradually expanding in rural areas.

To consider different perspectives, this study suggests some policy implications which may help overcome the negative impacts of globalization on four traditional handicraft industries in Brazil:

- The government of Brazil may play the key role in the restoration of traditional and indigenous knowledge and local identity. However, further extensive research is needed to study the impact of globalization on indigenous handicraft industries.

- The government should pay more attention to integration and regional cooperation in the traditional handicraft industries, where mass poverty and social inequality are high. The workers employed in these industries are marginalized over time. And it turns particularly important how the country can provide equalization in the situation of globalization so that such marginalization could be minimized.

- It is important to improve regional integration among Latin American countries, where natural disasters, climate change and political conflicts have an impact on the globalization process.

- Local identity throughout Brazil becomes so scarce today. Like traditional handicraft industries much of the national heritage, local and indigenous knowledge, habits and cultures, social norms and values, clothes and fashion, arts and architecture, history, occupations, food, music, carnivals, sports, sculpture, literature, *etc.* continue to disappear. It can be problematic to find differences between people in future. The young generation will face more identity crises. The government together with international institutions such as UNESCO should play the key role in preservation and expansion of the value of these identities.

- A good initiative should come from the government how to make the localization process smoother and how to extend this process. If necessary, the exchange of experience and technical support from international experts should be expanded so that many global initiatives can be successfully implemented without compromising on the environment and the quality of production.

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### **Conflict of interest**

No conflict of interest among the authors.

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